

# Introduction

Each of us has a story. In fact, each of us **is** a story, an ongoing string of events and facts, causes and effects, relationships and decisions, day by day.

It's the same with Jesus. He has stories that he tells — parables — and he also is a story. Even with 4 gospels, we don't have the full story.

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.<sup>¶1</sup>

But why this story in Mat 21 at the beginning of Advent?

## Explanation

### Intentional

In order to understand Matthew 21:1–11, we need to understand that Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. He knew that the triumphal entry was the first in a series of events that led to his cross and crown.<sup>¶2</sup> In Mat 20, he told the disciples,

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.<sup>¶3</sup>

And this fact—that of his soon coming trial—is not an isolated event in Jesus' life, without meaning, or an accident.

### Micro-story

There are also a number of smaller “stories” going on in this passage.

- The disciples are learning obedience, doing what they're told to do and getting the colt upon which Jesus is to ride.
- We have the crowd's reaction, using branches from the trees and laying

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<sup>1</sup> John 21.25.

<sup>2</sup> See Edersheim's 4 part structure of the gospels in "Life and Times": 1) Manger to Baptism in Jordan, 2) Ascent: Jordan to Transfiguration, 3) Descent: Transfiguration to Valley of Humiliation, 4) Cross and Crown.

<sup>3</sup> Matt 20.17–19.

down their garments in the road as a symbol of submission and honor.

- We have the children, and the cynical Sanhedrin, and the naïve onlookers. We have all these things—and more.

## Macro-story

We also have larger stories going on.

- We have the 2 citations from Isa 62 and Zech 9.9 in verse 5, showing that in that moment OT prophecy is being fulfilled.
- The use of branches was a direct symbol from the usages of the feast of tabernacles—a feast of thanksgiving.
- We have the shouting of “Hosanna,” from the same root word from which we get the names “Joshua” and “Jesus”, meaning “salvation.”
- We heard Jesus called the “Son of David,” which he is by genealogy, but which he also is as the great David’s greater son.

## On-going story

If we trace from Matthew 21:1 forward, we see that these events are perfectly interlocked and inexorably draw him — and we who follow him — toward his arrest, trials, crucifixion, and resurrection.

- Jesus dominates the scene.
  - (12) He’s called Savior and Son of David, the promised one of God.
  - (12) He overturns the tables of currency exchange, calling public attention to the shameless and illegal greed of the temple officials.
  - (23) When the religious leaders try to put him down, he destroys them with logic and his knowledge of Scripture.
  - (28) Using the parable of the 2 sons, he shows that the leaders are not true sons of the covenant.
  - (33) He uses the parable of the landowner and the wicked tenants, showing them how wicked they have been throughout their history,
  - The wedding feast parable (22:1), showing the religious leaders were not worthy of the great feast of the Lord.
- The Sanhedrin push back.
  - They try to test him about taxes (22:15),
  - marriage and the resurrection (23),
  - On the law (34),
  - and even on his Messianic theology (41), an area of expertise for Jesus, of course!
- Jesus goes full on against the religious leaders. Chapter 23 is an open

condemnation, pronouncing “woe” upon “woe” on them.<sup>4</sup>

In the end, the religious leaders abandon all pretensions of being objective and scholarly and they gather together to falsely accuse Jesus.

We all know this story, of course.

Here, in Mat 21, sovereign God is not caught up in the chaos of time, or political confusion. This moment in these verses, rich with theology, history, personality, and psychology, demonstrates that Triune God is ordering time and circumstance, so as to bring the 2nd person of the Trinity to the exact purpose and point of his incarnation. Jesus came to do exactly what he did in Matthew 21 and the events following.

The destroying of speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and for taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ himself, and to punish all disobedience.<sup>5</sup>

And everything that came before, and all that came after — up until this day in this place! — is God’s carefully crafted story leading existence somewhere.

## Interpretation

Matthew 21 is an event filled with OT symbolism, political intrigue, public naïvety, and innocent children. But this story is also just one part of a much larger tale.

- It started with a garden, and 2 people with no clothes on. Romantic enough, perhaps, for the two of them; but the situation quickly went downhill from there.
- Sometimes the story went completely silent.<sup>6</sup>
- Sometimes the story had exciting parts with glory and wealth. In other parts, there was humiliation, bloodshed, and despair.
- At times there were leaders that were worthy of admiration. At other times, the leaders were vicious, cowardly, self-seeking, and useless. Sometimes, they were the same leader—think of David.

But no one piece of the story was the whole story, any more than Mat 21 is the whole story. And the story-teller kept telling the story.

## Narrative & Meta-narrative

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<sup>4</sup> Much like the covenant oaths and curses found in Deu 11:29 ff.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor 10.4–6.

<sup>6</sup> Think of the captivity in Egypt (Gen 15:13) and the inter-testamental period (Malachi to Matthew).

Let's look at this a little differently. We have used the terms "narrative" and "meta-narrative" from this pulpit before.

- Narrative is story, an event, or a series of connected events.
- Meta-narrative is the grander story above all the smaller stories. It's the idea that all the various littler stories are part of the fabric of a far bigger story that applies to everything.<sup>7</sup>

Meta-narrative is a way of saying that life makes sense, that life is going somewhere and has meaning. It's the idea that no matter how bad things appear to be in the moment, Snidely Whiplash will always get justice in the end and Nell will always be rescued by Dudley Do-right before the train comes.

But there are some who hold to an idea there is no meta-narrative, an idea that's sometimes identified with so-called post-modernism. This idea says that the previous generations' "faith" in science and reason have been replaced with skepticism and relativism.<sup>8</sup> We're told that there is no grander story, or meta-narrative.<sup>9</sup>

You have your story. I have my story. Perhaps our stories will even intersect for a time and affect each other. But they're just stories. Sometimes the good guy wins. Sometimes the good guy loses. But there is no overall guiding hand, no relevance to be found in looking at yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Life is random and chaotic and then you die.

This is a logical position to hold, **if one denies God**. If one denies God, one denies purpose. There's no story-teller and no plan. Deny purpose, and you deny meaning. Life becomes merely a series of perfectly random biological, mechanical, and electrical functions. In that path lies hopelessness, fatalism, even self-destruction.

But Matthew 21 and the whole Bible tells us something much different. Did you wonder why the early church saw fit to use a Palm Sunday story to start Advent? Matt 21 introduces Advent with an event that knits together past,

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<sup>7</sup> "A metanarrative is a grand narrative common to all. The term refers, in critical theory and particularly in postmodernism, to a comprehensive explanation, a narrative about narratives of historical meaning, experience or knowledge, which offers a society legitimation through the anticipated completion of a (as yet unrealised) master idea." See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metanarrative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metanarrative).

<sup>8</sup> See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generations#List\\_of\\_generations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generations#List_of_generations) for a helpful and simple description.

<sup>9</sup> "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives [...] The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language [...] Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?" —Jean-François Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge" (1979), cited [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metanarrative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metanarrative).

present, and future.

- Past: because he is fulfilling a prophecy made by 2 prophets: Isaiah about 750 years before and Zechariah over 500 years before (vs 5).
- Present: because he is exactly what the people are calling him: “Son of David” and Savior, “Hosianna.” He is the Nazarene prophet who comes in the name of the Lord (9, 11) to save his people from their sins.
- Future: because this celebration is reminiscent of another celebration that will take place as described in the book of the Revelation of John:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”<sup>¶10</sup>

What some call a meta-narrative is what theologians call redemptive history: creation, fall, and redemption. It’s God’s plan to destroy the destruction of the fall and to make “all things new.”<sup>¶11</sup> What some interpret as mere story in its most simple sense, the Scriptures define as a plan governed by God’s hand.

A commentator wrote this about the use of Mat 21 on the 1st Sunday in Advent.

We have ... a repetition ... of our Lord’s first coming to His own, when “His own received Him not”; and an anticipation of His coming to judgment, “when every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him.”<sup>¶12</sup>

His entry was ... a day of grace to the otherwise doomed city. Jesus is in his last days on the way to the cross and this is a last and supreme opportunity for previous errors, perversenesses, cruelties—unbelief—to be redressed by a free acceptance and pardon. [...] It was a day of grace, in which God’s Blessed Son showed the light of His countenance, and was merciful to His people.

It was also a day of judgment. [...] Separation is the very first step in any process of judgment; and separation was the order of the day when our Lord entered Jerusalem. He seemed to be, or to be about to be, on His trial; but in reality He was Judge, and His seeming judges were in the dock before His tribunal.<sup>¶13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rev 7.9–17.

<sup>11</sup> Rev 21:5.

<sup>12</sup> John 1:11, Rev 1:7.

<sup>13</sup> “Elements of a Religious Movement,” by H. P. Liddon, from *Advent in St. Paul’s Sermons Bearing Chiefly on the Two Comings of Our Lord*, Volume I. Rivingtons, London, 1889 [Second Edition, Revised]. Sermon I. for the First Sunday in Advent. St.

These skeptical religious leaders, and the unaware folk of the city and country, even the little children were part of the story themselves. And nothing could stop the story, even to the point that when some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples”, Jesus answered, “I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!”<sup>¶14</sup>

## Application

This is not just a story in a book. It’s our story, too, that the story-teller is writing.

You formed my inward parts; you wove me in my mother’s womb. [...] And in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.<sup>¶15</sup>

Some of the story of Mat 21 is obvious for us. Would we rather be like the children singing praises — though perhaps not fully understanding all that is going on — or like the Sanhedrin, plotting, cynical, and hell-bound? So our lives are part of the meta-narrative, too.

Together with this, Jesus’ story is still being told. Though New Testament canon is closed—we’re not getting new revelation and and rewriting the Bible, as some think we should do—it doesn’t mean that God has stopped working in the world. As we have been trying to demonstrate in our series in Acts, we are a continuation of the stories that we read in Acts. We are, as it were, the 30<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts.

Redemptive work is still going on. The church is still the bride of Christ. Jesus still lives to make intercession for us at the right had of the Father. The Holy Spirit continues to be the comforter. The story is not yet over!

So we have the story of our lives. We have the on-going story of Jesus’ work in the world. And here’s the most important part: Jesus’ story encompasses our story.

Here’s the harder part to grasp, I think. We tend more to be like Shakespeare’s Macbeth, than the apostle Peter. Macbeth saw life as meaningless stories, with no grand scheme.

Life’s but a walking shadow; a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more: it is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound

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Matt. xxi. 10. See [www.lectionarycentral.com/advent1/Liddon.html](http://www.lectionarycentral.com/advent1/Liddon.html).

<sup>14</sup> Luke 19.39–40.

<sup>15</sup> Ps 139.13–16.

and fury, Signifying nothing.¶<sup>16</sup>

But Peter saw his life and ours as part of a much grander story told by the best story-teller that ever existed.

Do not overlook this ... fact, beloved, that the Lord [...] is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation.¶<sup>17</sup>

Do you see the difference?

IF ADVENT IS TO MEAN ANYTHING . . . we need to see the entire story.

- It's not just something that was prophesied about 3000 years ago.
- Or something that happened 2000 years ago.
- It's something that IS happening right now, as well.
- And it encompasses our stories, too.

Advent is a penitential season, not a festive season like Easter. Why is that? Because the little baby born in the feed-trough in a cave/barn came from glory to humiliation, to lift us who are humiliated before God the Father into glory.

- *Law*
- *Exhortation*
- *No Gloria.*
- *Speak about following Propers throughout the season, essay in last Evangelist regarding this idea.*

How do we make our story coincide with Jesus' story?

*"When we walk with the Lord,  
In the light of his word,  
What a glory he sheds on our way.  
When we do his good will,  
He abides with us still,  
And with all who will trust and obey.  
Trust and obey, for there's no other way,  
To be happy in Jesus,  
Than to trust and obey."*

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<sup>16</sup> Macbeth, Act V, Scene iv.

<sup>17</sup> 2Pe 3.8–9, 14–15.